The Colonial Debris of Bandung: Facilitating the Rise of the Hindu Right in India, Ratna Kapur

"The despised, the insulted, the hurt, the dispossessed -- in short, the underdogs of the human race were meeting. Here were class and racial and religious consciousness on a global scale…..This meeting of the rejected was in itself a kind of judgment upon the Western world!" (Curtain 1955, p. (Curtain R., *The colour of curtain*, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1956)

"[o]ne day everybody is themselves—and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols" (Kidwai 1991, p. 93) Kidwai B., *Cracking India* (London: Milkweed Editions, 1991) p. 93

In April 1955, a gathering of over 600 delegates and 29 nations at Bandung met to articulate a "third way" of operating within the existing global order that was increasingly being shaped by Cold War alliances. It was an effort that combined the nationalist urges of Asian and African countries, whose common goal was to struggle against colonialism, racism, discrimination, and for equality for all.

And while these noble endeavours continue to inform the spirit of the constitutions of a number of countries present at Bandung, sixty years on, scholars have increasingly questioned whether the values that infused Bandung with a sense of purpose and progress have boomeranged. In this article I examine how the modernist project of challenging racism, discrimination, and securing equality, are all ideals that have been used by conservative and right wing forces in the postcolonial context to set up a relationship with its own citizenry on terms that are precisely reminiscent of the colonial encounter. And the seeds for this endeavor are found in the anti-colonial, anti-western framing of the Bandung conference, where newly formed nation-states sought to set themselves up as part of a distinct cultural and national project.

I pursue this discussion in the context of postcolonial India, and how the revolutionary cravings for liberal equality are ultimately restrained by a nationalist pursuit that is articulated within a cultural and political sensibility that seeks to distinguish itself from the west, and the former colonial power (Vajpeyi 2012). It is this tension that has enabled the rise of the Hindu Right dedicated to establishing India as a Hindu State, and eventually culminating in the election of Narenda Modi, a member of the Hindu Right's ideological wing the Rashtriya Swayam Seva (RSS – National Volunteer Organisation) as India's prime minister in May 2014. [1]

I unpack how Bandung's embrace of a postcolonial nationalist project that prioritized the form of the modern nation-state unleashed a deeply conservative force in India, laying bear the dark side of the ostensibly progressive liberal commitments of Bandung. This dark side has been nurtured by the Indian judiciary in a number of landmark decisions that have enabled the advancement of the agenda of the Hindu Right parties. In particular, their vision of a Hindu nation-state is advanced in and through the pursuit of the discourse of the right to equality and secularism.

In this paper I discuss a central paradox of Bandung: how the embrace of human rights and equality for all by the countries present (Part C, Human Rights and Self-Determination, Final Communiqué, 1955) is set in tension with an emphasis on their distinct anti-colonial, non-western, cultural and civilizational formation (Part B, Cultural Co-Operation, Final Communiqué 1955). This tension between equality and difference not only plays out externally, where the postcolonial nation-state asserts its distinct political and cultural position from the "West", but also internally in countries such as postcolonial India, where it produced the very politics of exclusion and subordination of the "other", specifically religious minorities, which was a core feature of colonial governance. This feature thus implicates Bandung in the colonial debris that lies scattered in the sensibilities of the postcolonial present.

The toxic and violent accruals of the colonial past are not time bound and take on durable forms in the present through the very tools of modernity that mark the arrival of the postcolonial nation state, including human rights. In postcolonial India, this durability is enabled partly through the displacement of the Nehurvian vision of a nation-state based on an understanding of secularism committed to a wall of separation between religion and state, in favour of a Gandhian vision based on the equal treatment of all religions.[2] This tangible shift provides an inroad for the forces of the Hindu Right to develop the principles of equality, freedom of religion and tolerance, which are the constitutive elements of Indian secularism, in a direction that supports their vision of establishing a Hindu state and paves the way for their ultimate emergence as a powerful and significant force in contemporary Indian politics.

The values of Bandung, celebrated as a point of arrival for newly independent nation states and freedom from colonial rule, obscured the imperial effects or dark side that shadowed these values. These effects weave their way through the body and soul of a nation-state, and leave their mark in tangible, though also elusive ways. While India embraced the project of human rights as a central feature of the modern liberal democratic state, the understanding of these rights is shaped against the historical backdrop of the colonial encounter, which nurtured a cultural nationalism that enabled the articulation of the nation-state as distinctly Hindu. In this understanding the fundamental human rights of religious minorities became contingent on either assimilating to Hindu majoritarianism by surrendering their distinct cultural and religious identity or risking exclusion, incarceration, and even annihilation for failing to comply.

I focus on how the paradox presented at Bandung, between an anti-colonial nationalism and equality, was not a recipe for a radical politics. In the first part of this paper, I discuss the work of two of the early ideologues of the Hindu Right, V. D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar to illustrate how this paradox partly facilitates the rise of the Hindu Right, and its ability to justify Hindu majoritarianism in and through the discourse of equality secularism. In the second part, I examine how the judiciary increasingly validates the Hindu Rights version of equality and secularism and in the process Hindu majoritarianism. The end result is not a betrayal of the Bandung dream, but rather a manifestation of the dark side that constituted part of that dream.

Cultural Distinction and the Rise of the "Hindu Nation"

The Bandung conference was in part an expression of the reassertion of the distinct traditional cultures and religions of those present that colonial rule had tried to reform, marginalize or eradicate. In the context of the modern world, the conference called for a renewal of ancient Asian and African cultures and religions, which were seen as thwarted in their development for centuries as a result of colonial rule (Wright 1956, p. 204). At the cultural level, the construction of an "Asian" voice was a unifying force that was set in opposition to the "West" in terms of race, religion and culture. This effort to identify and embrace that, which was distinct from the west, would have the effect of calling for a return to a pre-colonial, pre-colonised era, and excavation of that which was truly authentic.

Jawaharlal Nehru himself embodied this vision of a nation as distinct from the west, and in Bandung was regarded as projecting a culturally superior attitude induced by a "conscious identification with an ancient civilization." (Romulo 1956, pp.11-12). This vision became prescient of the ways in which fundamentalist and deeply conservative forces would repeat the colonial effects of governance in response to their religious minorities. Within postcolonial India, culture, religion and race, were all deployed not only in contradistinction to the Christian west, but also to the religious "other", most specifically the Muslim. Both of these moves were essential to the establishment of a distinct national identity.

While Nehru and the Indian National Congress party struggled to find ways to balance the diverse segments of the population in the nationalist project, the Hindu Mahasabha, a nationalist organization founded in 1914 and that campaigned for Hindu political unity, took advantage of this political indeterminacy by firmly and forcefully emphasizing that the life of the sovereign state could only be construed and representative of a portion of its citizenry – that is the Hindus.[3] The most influential early exponent of this position was V.D. Sarvarkar, president of the Hindu Mahasabha (Sarvarkar 1923). Savarkar argued that the inimitable Indian state formation was to be crystallized through the energies of Hindus to pursue a distinct sovereign form that was founded and articulated in conflict with the emerging idea of Pakistan as well as the Indian Republic as envisioned by Nehru. While Sarvarkar and Nehru were both opposed to every manifestation of Empire, their positions diverged on how the newly emerging nation state was going to assert its autonomy and identity (Sarkar 2002; Sarkar et al, 1993).

Nehru and the Congress party were intent on establishing a British model of governance where sovereignty was equated with a coming together of "consensual political will, paternalistic protection, and a universal democratic citizenry's inalienable right to life "(Basu 2008, p. 146). In contrast, V.D. Sarvarkar's ideology was based on the commonality of one section of the citizenry:

> [T]he life of a nation is the life of that portion of its citizens whose interests and history and aspirations are most closely bound up with the land and who thus provide the real foundation to the structure of their national state…So with the Hindus, they being the people whose past, present, and future are most closely bound with the soil of Hindusthan as *Pitribhu* [Fatherland], as

> *Punyabhu* [Holyland], they constitute the foundation, the bedrock, *the reserved forces of the Indian State* (Sarvarkar 1989, p. 139).

The pamphlet was published at a time when the Hindu Mahasabha was in the midst of developing a response to the government's 1909 Minto-Moreley reforms.[4] These reforms gave separate electorates to candidates who mobilized under the banner of the Muslim League.[5] The Act became a precursor to the two-nation theory that garnered strength as Muslims in India became increasingly uncomfortable with the idea of being a minority in a free and independent India. The Congress attempted to maneuver this tension through an alliance with the League and the conceptualization of an Undivided India (*Akhand Bharat*). In contrast, the Hindu Mahasabha's intervention opposed the secular balance advocated by the Congress, and identified Hindus as a distinct race, with an originary way of life and cultural values. This ideological stand articulated, as *Hindutva* was to be the basis of the distinct national identity and homeland espoused by the Hindu Mahasabha.

Sarvarkar emphasised that Hindutva and Hinduness were political concepts, and also that that Hindutva was different from Hinduism.

> [W]hen we attempt to investigate into the essential significance of Hindutva we do not primarily- and certainly not mainly – concern ourselves with any particular theocratic or religious dogma or creed. Had not linguistic usage stood in our way then `Hinduness' would have certainly been a better word than Hinduism as a near parallel to Hindutva. Hindutva embraces all the departments of thought and activity of the whole being of our Hindu role (Sarvarkar 1989, pp. 3-4).

Sarvarkar used the argument of Hindutva and Hinduness as distinct from Hinduism as a means for achieving superiority of the Hindu race, rather than religion. According to Savarkar, "Hindus are not merely the citizens of the Indian state because they are united not only by the bonds of love they bear to a common motherland but also by the bonds of a common blood…" (Sarvarkar 1989, pp. 115-116). In this definition, a Hindu was thus classified in racial terms. But Sarvarkar did not stop at this concept of a common fatherland and a common racial bond. Rather, for him, a Hindu was also one who inherits Indian civilization and share a common cultural heritage as well as religion, namely Hinduism. In Savarkar's definition a Hindu is a "person who regards the land of Bharatvarsha from Indus to the East as his Fatherland as well as his Holyland – that is the cradle of his religion" (Sarvarkar 1989, p. 116). It is though this elision of the fatherland and the holyland that Savarkar constructs the political category of Hindu in opposition to non-Hindus, particularly to Muslims and Christians, who, while sharing a common fatherland, their holyland was other than India. The construction of a `Hindu race' was thus achieved by continuously posting a conflict between the `Hindu' and `others', most notably, the `Muslim invader. Thus, while Savarkar was emphatic that Hindutva was

distinct from Hinduism, it was also clear in his writings that Hinduism was an important part of being Hindu. Despite the emphasis on racial differences, it was the difference of religion that remained as a constituting moment of the oppositional identities. This position is similar to how the final communiqué of Bandung blends religion and civilization. Both Hindutva and Bandung had a cultural "other": Muslims and the West respectively.

The definition of the *Hindu Rashtra* (Hindu Nation) was further articulated in the writings of M.S. Golwalkar.[6] Golwalkar's vision of a Hindu nation included five components: geography or country; race, religion, culture and language (Golwalkar 1939, p. 18). Golwalkar argued that the Hindus qualified under each of these categories, and thus, constituted a nation. "Hindustan, the land of the Hindus... a definite geographical entity" constitutes a country. "[T]he Hindu Race is united together by common traditions, . . . memories, . . . culture, .. .language,... [and] customs," and thus constitutes a race (Golwalkar 1939, p. 40). On religion and culture he stated that Hinduism is the "only religion in the world worthy of being so denominated, which in its variety is still an organic whole" (Golwalkar 1939, p. 41). Through this religion "the Race evolved a culture which despite the degenerating contact with the debased 'civilisations' of the Mussalmans and the Europeans, for the last ten centuries, is still the noblest in the world" (Golwalkar 1939,p. 43). Golwalkar concluded, "this country, Hindustan, the Hindu Race with its Hindu Religion, Hindu, Culture, and Hindu Language, complete the Nation concept" (Golwalkar 1939,p. 45-46)

While Hindutva is at one level a project of cultural, racial, and linguistic homogenisation, it is also articulated as a geographical project. "Hindustan, the land of the Hindus, is a definite geographical unity" that constitutes a country (Golwalkar 1939, p. 40). While Bandung can be understood as a state building project to seize power from the West, Hindutva is a state building project designed to exclude or erase the Muslim "other."

Despite Golwalkar's insistence on the distinct nature of the five categories, it is in fact the common religion of Hinduism from which the entire definition of the Hindu Nation is derived. Race is defined in terms of a common culture. And culture is in turn defined almost wholly in terms of a common religion, since in Golwalkar's view religion and culture for the Hindus are virtually indistinguishable. Country is simply the geographical territory where a people united by religion/ culture/race live, and language, similarly, that which a people united by religion/ culture/race, speak. The priority of religion within this construct reveals that the appeal for a Hindu Nation is thus very much an appeal to religion.

In Golwalkar's discussion those who were not a part of the Hindu Race still had a chance to be a part of the Hindu Nation if they abandoned their differences, adopted the religion, culture and language of the Hindu Nation and completely merged themselves in the national race (Golwalkar 1966, p. 130). The call for assimilation was thus, first and foremost, a call for religious assimilation; for minorities to return to the folds of Hinduism. It was only secondarily a call to

assimilate into the culture and race, in so far as this culture and race is one that is derivative of the religious category. Golwalkar makes clear that those religious minorities who failed to assimilate must "lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential *treatment-not even citizen's rights*" (Golwalkar 1939, pp.47-48) [emphasis added]. The Hindu Nation was thus constituted in the writings of Golwalkar through an expression of enmity to religious minorities.

These conceptualizations of the Hindu Nation continue to inform the political agenda of the Hindu Right today. The contemporary ideologues of the Hindu Right continue to emphasize a distinction between Hindu and Hinduism, and to insist that Hindu is an attitude of allegiance. The supremacy of Hinduism remains the basis of the political claims against the minorities, who follow religions that allow neither toleration nor secularism. It is within this context that the campaign to construct a Ram temple in Ayodhya acquired such importance and that the religious nature of the political rhetoric of the Hindu Right has become most evident.

`Belief' in Secularism

In the Ayodhya campaign the Hindu Right sought to have the 16th century Babri Masjid replaced with a Hindu temple. It has proved to be enormously successful in generating broad-based support for the Hindu Right. The Hindu Right alleged that the mosque was built on the site of the birth of the Hindu god Ram and demanded that it be removed, and a temple commemorating the birth of Ram be built in its place. The campaign succeeded in mobilizing thousands of supporters, some of whom followed the marchers to Ayodhya, while many others sent money and bricks to help construct the new temple. On 6th December 1992, mobs of the Hindu Right destroyed the Babri Masjid, triggering massive communal riots around the country, in which thousands of people were killed.

Despite the national outcry condemning the Hindu Right, and the role of the BJP in the destruction and the violence that followed in its wake, the political momentum of the BJP continued to grow. In the 1996 national elections, the BJP emerged as the largest single political party and was asked to form the government. Unable to secure the support required to form a coalition government, the BJP government fell within two weeks. But the enormous increase in its popularity among the Indian electorate could not be ignored. In the 1998 elections, following the collapse of the United Front government (an unstable alliance of India's regional parties and the Left, with Congress supporting the coalition from the outside), the BJP again emerged as the largest single party, and successfully formed a coalition government that governed from 1999 to 2004. It was again voted out of power in the 2004 elections, after presiding over the worst communal riots since Independence, in Gujarat in 2002 where Narender Modi was the state's chief minister. However, in May 2014, the BJP was elected with a majority government after ten years of rule by the National Democractic Alliance, a coalition led by the

Congress party. Narender Modi, a former *pracharak* (lobbyist) of Hindutva and member of the RSS, was anointed the new Prime Minister.

The 2014 elections signal a major shift in the political and cultural constellation of India in the direction that was envisioned by the early ideologues of the Hindu Right. The successful political inroads of the BJP must be seen in the broader context of the discursive struggles of the Hindu Right in which they have attempted to establish their vision of Hindutva as ideologically dominant, partly by using the very principles of equality as well as cultural distinction embraced by the Bandung conference. Through their collective efforts, they have sought to naturalize the ideas of Hindutva by making these ideas a part of the common sense of an increasingly large segment of Hindu society as well as by making inroads into the constitutional definition of secularism, which has received judicial sanction.

In the contemporary political terrain Hindutva thus continues to be a political category that is distinct from the religion of Hinduism, but which relies on religion in constituting the political category of Hindu. It is opposite to the Nehruvian vision of state as the sum of its fragments and one committed to a secular ideal based on a model separation of state and religion and state neutrality in all matters of religion. This model based on the idea that religion could be exorcised from the body politic of a nation seemed to contradict the underlying and unifying idea of the Bandung conference, where those present sought to distinguish themselves from the West, partly through the reassertion of their distinct cultural and religious values as set out in the final communiqué. Both Hindutva and Bandung draw on the logic of tolerance as opposed to neutrality, and it is this move that influences the Hindu Rights embrace of a distinct model of secularism within the Indian context.

At the point of Independence, the Hindu Right endorsed the Gandhian model of secularism based on the equal treatment of all religions. Like the liberal democratic vision of secularism, the Indian model is based on equality and freedom of religion. However, toleration displaces the third principle of the liberal vision – that is neutrality- in the Indian model.[7] The Hindu Right has used this model of secularism to challenge the appeasement of the religious minorities while simultaneously entrenching Hindu majoritarianism. They have sought to cast themselves as the true inheritors of India's secular tradition or the promoters of "genuine" secularism. Their success in infusing the constitutional principles of secularism and equality with new meaning, consistent with its vision of Hindutva, was evident in the Hindutva cases (1996) of the Indian Supreme Court as well as the Allahabad High Court's decision in 2010 in suits filed with respect to a disputed area of land in Ayodhya, where the Hindu Right parties have sought to construct a Ram temple. These judgments need to situated within the broader context of the discursive struggles of the Hindu Right and its efforts to legitimize its vision of Hindu supremacy as well as the articulation of the free and independent India as a Hindu nation-state.

The Indian Supreme Court has played a critical role in defining the content of religion, where ideas of nationalism as well as Hindu majoritarianism increasingly converge, and in the process establishing the contours of secularism. The most famous decisions delivered by the Court in 1996 were in the *Hindutva* cases.[8] In these cases, several speeches of *Shiv Sena/BJP* candidates during a state election campaign in 1987 were challenged as appealing to religion to gain votes and in the process promote religious enmity in violation of the provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. Although the Court found several of the accused guilty, it also held that *Hindutva* - the ideological linchpin of the Hindu Right - simply represented "a way of life of people of the subcontinent."[10]

According to the Court, *Hindutva* could not to be equated with or understood as religious fundamentalism or as a depiction of an attitude hostile to persons practicing other religions. Rather, *Hindutva* was used to promote secularism - emphasising the way of life of the Indian people and the Indian culture, or to criticize the policy of any political party as discriminating or intolerant.[11] It held that appealing to *Hindutva* was neither an appeal to religion nor a promotion of religious hatred, and thus not a violation of the Act.

The decision illustrates how secularism comes to be equated with majoritarianism through *Hindutva*. The Court's conclusion on the meaning of *Hindutva* is legally, historically, and politically unsupportable. The writings of the ideological leaders discussed earlier, reveal how *Hindutva* was the mental state or attitude of the Hindu race and the Hindu nation - a race and a nation that were, at their very core, about religion. And the minorities were constructed as the enemies or threat to this Hindu nation.

Fourteen years later, on September 30th, 2010, the Allahabad High Court decided largely in favour of the Hindu parties in the suits filed to determine the title to the plot of land on which they have sought to build a Ram temple – precisely on the spot where the Babri mosque once stood. While the case is a complicated one (Kapur 2014), all the judges seemed to agree that worship at the site constituted a core ingredient for the Hindu faith, and in the words of one judge, to disallow prayer would be “to extinguish the very religion.” [9]

CONCLUSION

The principles of equality and recognition of cultural and civilizational differences set out in the Bandung Final Communique are inherently in tension. Bandung employed a universalism that was expressed in terms of an imagined “ renewal” of a pre-imperial cultural and spiritual alliance amongst African and Asian nations, despite their differences. Yet the Bandung principles (and international law) recognising the equality of all races, sat in conflict with the abstention from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of another. And this paradox of Bandung foregrounds the possibility of a Hindu state through its adoption of the universal principles of human rights, including the right to equality, while also recognizing the cultural and civilization distinction of those countries present from the west as well as from the Muslim “other”.

The Hindu Right has secured an ideological grip within legal discourse where their successful engagements with the discourses of equality and secularism have been powerful and persuasive. And the judicial decisions are increasingly reflecting the influence of this discursive strategy, where secularism has come to be equated with Hindutva, the ideological core of the Hindu Right, and sameness in treatment. This narrowing of the understanding of equality and secularism has enabled the production of more violence against religious minorities, justified in terms of self-defence, as well as the setting up such minorities as opposed to the secularism, equality, and the basic values of the constitution.

The discussion highlights some of the less perceptible effect of the colonial encounter, which operated through the ecologies of governance in and through liberal rights. These effects do not amount to a wholesale embrace of colonial technologies (Mbembe 2001), but a reformulation and reordering of the art of governance in the management of religious minorities, while also constituting the very identity of the modern nation-state. The durabilities of these forms of governance are mutated in the postcolonial present, are less visible and hence more insidious in remaining less identifiable.

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[1] The'Hindu Right' refers to the main organizations and political parties in India including-the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (Indian Peoples Party), the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) (National Volunteer Organisation), and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) (World Hindu Council), as well as the militantly anti-Muslim Shiv Sena (footsoldiers of Shiva). The central ideology of this political movement is *Hindutva* (literally translated as 'Hinduness'), which seeks to establish the political, cultural and religious supremacy of Hinduism, and the Hindu nation.

[2] The "equal treatment of all religions" is a model of secularism that does not require a wall of separation between religion and politics (Engineer 1995)

[3] The establishment of the Hindu Mahasabha was partly in response to the rise of the Muslim Legal, which was increasingly seeking a separate homeland. The Mahasbaha supported Hindu political unity, including education and economic development for Hindus as well as the reconversions of Muslims to Hinduism. It was also opposed to the vision of secularism that was envisaged by the Congress under Nehru.

[4] Indian Councils Act1909.

[5] The All India Muslim League was founded in 1906 by Aga Khan III. Its subsequent leaders proposed the creation of separate Muslim India, a demand that was formally made in 1940 under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, in the form of Pakistan

[6] Madhav Sadhashiv Golwalkar was an active member of the RSS, the ideological wing of the Hindu Right. He became the second Supreme Chief (*Sarsangchalak*) of the RSS from 1940-1973 and a major exponent of the ideological doctrine to establish India as a Hindu *Rashtra* (State). He called upon the religious minorities to give up their "foreign mental complexion and merge in the common stream of our national life" (Golwalkar 1966, p. 130; Sharma 2007)

[7] The separation thesis was rejected partly on the grounds that it was a distinctly western concept. At the same time, the secularism project was also deeply implicated in the formulation of nationalism, that provided a counter to the challenges posed by Muslims and other disadvantaged groups as well as to British colonial discourses: SHABNUM TEJANI, INDIAN SECULARISM: A SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY, 1890-1950 (2007).

[8] For the purpose of brevity I refer to the lead case *Dr. Prabhoo v. Prabhakar Kasinath Kunte and Ors.* 1995 S.C.A.L.E. 1

[9] Visharad v. Ahmad, O.O.S., No. 1 of 1989, All. H.C., 4 (2010) (opinion of Sharma, J., volume 4) p. 121